

## FACT SHEET

### FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH: AUSTRALIA

#### Getting started

Work from the present to the past, and begin by collecting information from readily available sources. Before you search public records, interview family members about their memories and about any documents or photographs in their possession. You will need names, dates and other personal details if you want to request information from public records offices. You may also wish to search the White Pages for individuals who share your family name.

You can save a lot of time by accessing online indexes produced by libraries and by the state and national archives. You will find everything—from information on convicts; deceased estates; courts; gaol photographs, immigration; orphans; police service registers; insolvency; school records and naturalization. Libraries and archives also provide downloadable fact sheets for family historians and other researchers. Remember that, under the privacy act, you will only have access to online records over thirty years old.

#### Accessing indexes

When you conduct a search, try to anticipate likely spelling variations for the first and family name of your relative. For example Giuseppe Franchini, who arrived in Australia in 1857, is entered in records variously as “Frankini”, “Franken”, “Frankoni” and “Frankins”. Some electronic databases help researchers to get around spelling anomalies by the insertion of a wildcard (\*). For example, typing “Fran\*” tells the database to search for any names beginning with the letters “Fran”.

The spelling of names is subject to regional variation and not all migrants were literate. Australian officials often wrote names phonetically, so that “Iozzi”, for example, may be recorded as “Yozzi”. Furthermore, copperplate handwriting of the 1800s can be hard to read, with the result that researchers and indexers sometimes incorrectly transcribe names, particularly those commencing with the capital letters F, I, L, J, S and T or H, M and W.

#### Other resources

If you are unable to conduct research yourself, some genealogical societies provide this service for a fee. Once you have completed research in Australia, you will be equipped with the information necessary to trace your ancestors in Italy. For more information, please refer to our fact sheet, [Family History Research: Italy](#).

Although the Italian Historical Society is not a genealogical centre, we do have a limited number of publications designed for family historians. For Internet links to Australian and international sites relating to family history research, please refer to our [Links](#) page on the Italian Historical Society website. Sites owned by state archives, the National Archives of Australia and libraries all provide useful downloadable guides for family historians.

#### Publishing your family history

In most cases, family histories are self-published. The society has a number of such publications, which you can consult by appointment. Once you have completed your own family history, you may wish to deposit a copy with the IHS.

## **Key records of interest**

### **Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) records**

You should begin your search with Births, Deaths and Marriages records. These are among the most reliable documents and will give you names, dates, locations and next of kin.

As of 2006, the New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages has an online index of historical records. Other states will follow. Indexes are also available on CD-ROM and microfiche at state and selected local libraries, some state archives, genealogical societies and the Family History Centers run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (JCLS). You can buy copies of BDM records from the registrar of births, deaths and marriages in each state.

### **Census, muster and electoral records**

State records offices hold census and muster records, some dating back to the foundation of the colony. These documents list individuals by name and in some cases provide details of others living in the same household. The Records Office of New South Wales has an online database of census records dating back to 1841. Other census records can be accessed by visiting the records office in the relevant state.

Electoral rolls can also provide names and addresses of individuals. Researchers need to bear in mind that women were not allowed to vote until 1905 and compulsory voting came into effect in 1915.

### **Immigration records**

#### **a. Shipping records**

Shipping records pertaining to a particular person are held by the state where he or she first arrived. Most state archives provide online indexes of their shipping records going up to 1922. The majority refer to passengers who arrived under government assistance.

You can search the National Archives of Australia (NAA) online RecordSearch database for shipping and immigration records. Newspapers of the period may also be of use for lists of unassisted migrants.

#### **b. Naturalisation and internment records**

Naturalisation records prior to 1903 are held by the state record offices.

Naturalisation and internment records post 1903 are with the NAA. The NAA is in the process of digitising these items for downloading from its RecordSearch database.

### **Other records of interest**

#### **Business records**

Company registration and bankruptcy records are held by state archives and the NAA. The latter also has patent registrations going back to the 1800s.

#### **Gold field/mining records**

References to miners can be located in the records of the Gold Commissioners and in the records of Mining Wardens' Courts in the Department of Mines. These are usually housed with the state archive. However, for NSW mining records, researchers should contact the Department of Mineral Resources.

#### **Land sales and transfers**

You will find records relating to the purchase and transfer of land from the Crown in the NAA and state archives.

**Military records**

You can search online for military records held by the Australian War Memorial, the National Archives of Australia and some state records offices.

**Overseas records**

You will find a directory of major overseas archives at your state library, some local libraries or JCLS Family History Centers. An online directory is available at the UNESCO portal. For a list of overseas Internet sites, please refer to our Links page on the Italian Historical Society website.

Italian Historical Society—COASIT, Melbourne

1st Floor, 189 Faraday Street, Carlton VIC Australia 3053

Tel: 61+ (0)3 9349 9020 Fax: 61+ (0)3 9349 1063 Email: [ih@coasit.com.au](mailto:ih@coasit.com.au)